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C O N F I D E N T I A L DOHA 000343

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/24/2019

TAGS: PREL PTER ECON EFIN SO OA

SUBJECT: SOMALIA -- PRIME MINISTER REAFFIRMS QATAR'S SUPPORT OF SHAYKH SHERIF; SAYS QATAR HAS NO PLANS NOW TO MEDIATE

REF: DOHA 276

Classified By: Ambassador Joseph E. LeBaron, for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

(C) KEY POINTS

-- Ambassador raised Somalia with Prime Minister Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani (HBJ) May 24, encouraging Qatar to support the government of Shaykh Sherif and to use Qatar's good offices to enlist the support of other regional governments for Shaykh Sherif.

-- HBJ reaffirmed Qatar's support for Shaykh Sherif, adding that Qatar does not maintain contacts with groups opposed to Shaykh Sherif's leadership.

-- HBJ was happy that the policies of the U.S. and Qatar are now more closely aligned, especially in terms of support for Shaykh Sherif.

(C) COMMENTS

-- The Prime Minister suggested that Somalia could be a topic of discussion in a U.S.-Qatar Strategic Dialogue, once it gets up and running (see septel (NOTAL)).

-- We have requested MFA appointments on May 31 for AF Deputy Assistant Secretary Karl Wycoff to discuss the situation in Somalia during his visit to Doha.

End Key Points and Comments.

¶1. (C) Ambassador raised May 24 with Qatar's Prime Minister, Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani, the situation in Somalia, encouraging Qatar's support for the government of Shaykh Sherif Ahmed and Qatar's enlisting the support of other regional governments for this same objective. HBJ reaffirmed what Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Ahmed Al-Mahmoud had said previously (reftel): Qatar supports Shaykh Sherif. HBJ also reaffirmed that Qatar is not involved in mediation in Somalia and has no plans to become involved there.

¶2. (C) Asked if the GOQ maintains contact with Al-Shabaab or other groups opposed to the current government headed by Shaykh Sherif Ahmed, the PM responded: "I would like to think we are smart enough not to do that." He then underscored Qatar's support for Shaykh Sherif.

¶3. (C) The Prime Minister noted that a few years back the U.S. barraged the GOQ with messages arguing that Qatar's support for Shaykh Sherif put it on the wrong side of the fence. The PM said much obviously has changed, since now Shaykh Sherif and the U.S. are on the same side.

¶4. (C) Open support from the U.S. for Shaykh Sherif, said the PM, poses a problem because it underscores that Shaykh Sherif is "your guy," which serves to undermine him by playing into the hands of those who oppose him. The PM joked that the U.S. could best support Shaykh Sherif by "making an announcement against him; he'll be in better shape."

LeBaron